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ABSTRACT

A recent survey reveals frustration with our inability to institute social change. Public affairs education has not been effectively linked to the energies of those willing to study and take action, such as students. Barriers to such a linkage include institutional rigidities; autonomy and jealousy; limited financing; differing concepts of public affairs education; and lack of appropriate mechanisms for pooling resources, exchanging information, and inter-institutional projects at the State, local, and national levels. A national coalition of broadcasting stations and public affairs agencies and organizations is needed to effect change in public affairs education. (Author/RS)

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NEEDED: A NEW COALITION FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS EDUCATION

(A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE)

Eugene I. Johnson

October 1972

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON ADULT EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

A recent survey reveals frustration with our inability to realize our American goals for all our diverse peoples. As yet we do not have an effective pattern and organization for public affairs education. The 1970 election showed how ETV programs were not effectively linked to the energies of people (such as college students) willing to study and take action. The roadblocks to such a linkage include: institutional rigidities, autonomy and jealousy; limited financing; differing concepts as to how education about public affairs does or should take place; and lack of appropriate mechanisms at the local, state, regional, and national levels for pooling resources, exchanging information, and cooperating in projects that cut across institutional lines. There is need for a national coalition of broadcasting stations and the many different organizations and agencies that have a stake in the education of the American people on public affairs to allocate some of their resources to the process of fusing their efforts in a concerted thrust for peaceful change.

NEEDED: A NEW COALITION FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS EDUCATION
(A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE)

Eugene I. Johnson

A recent Gallup survey (1)* revealed that four out of ten college students in the United States today believe that essential social change in this country will come about only through violence. Only 50 percent believe that our institutions can and will respond in a peaceful and orderly way to the new conditions that the balance of this century will establish. A large majority of persons at all age levels, reached in the same survey, agreed that the American political system responds too slowly to meet the needs of the people. The sense of unease and frustration is felt everywhere and it is shaping a climate in which violence could become the accepted way to accomplish change.

The hopeful finding in the same survey was that the vast majority of the young people -- 8 out of every 10 -- are proud to be Americans, still believe in the validity of the dreams that have guided this nation since its birth, and want very much to see those hopes realized. The survey finding thus reveals not so much disenchantment with the goals of American society, but frustration with our inability to realize them for all of our diverse peoples.

The turbulence generated by the mixture of idealism and frustration sends-- or ought to send --shock waves through the institutions serving the American people. For those of us engaged in public affairs education or public affairs broadcasting, the time for complacency is past. It is all too apparent that the many laudable efforts of national and local television stations and networks, colleges, universities, and schools and special purpose organizations devoted to educating the people in such areas as dangers to our environment, foreign affairs, civil rights, and others have not succeeded, in the eyes of the young people, in bringing about the kind of peaceful change desired. The present scene is long on statements by leaders in adult and continuing education and broadcasting (e.g., see Power (2), Blakely (3), and Magnuson (4).) but short on real accomplishments and programs.

It would be simple to dismiss the unfortunate present state of public affairs education as simply the lack of money. A number of other factors, however, contribute to the failure to produce so far an effective pattern and organization for public affairs education -- one that would bring the time, effort, and skills of many persons and organizations to a focus that would burn away dead tissue from our political and social system. It is the intent of this article to identify some of those contributing factors, to analyze the difficulties involved in resolving them, and to make some suggestions for new approaches. The major conclusion of this paper will be that there is an urgent need for a national coalition for public affairs education. Without the coming together of many different kinds of resources, and the focusing of the energies and skills of many people, we are not likely to see an effective

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*Numbers in parentheses refer to items in the bibliography beginning on page 10.

public affairs education program in time to avert the violence that almost 50 percent of our young people believe is certain to occur.

Wasted Resources in 1970 Campaign

Before turning to the radblocks that stand in the way of an effective public affairs education program, look at one example of the wastage of resources when they are channeled separately into uncoordinated efforts--the Congressional elections of November, 1970. When the campaign with all of its angry and hurtful rhetoric was over, many thoughtful analysts reached the conclusions that the American people had been denied a real opportunity to see the fundamental issues that exist in our national life ant to benefit from a clear-cut attempt to distinguish the differences in the approaches of parties and candidates to them. James Reston of the New York Times (5) put it this way:

> The election is almost over, but the problems remain. The campaign has not clarified them. It has diverted the attention of the people from the fundamental issues of poverty, unemployment, race, disarmament, and war to the issues of party personality, ideology, and the savage opposition of the young militants.

With some notable exceptions, broadcast programs of the campaign appeared to be largely dominated by attempts to pin the label of "soft on street disorders" or "soft on campus violence" on various candidates for state and national office. Vice President Agnew, charged with using divisive tactics in his campaign efforts on behalf of Republicans, responded that campaigns are divisive by their nature. It is essential, he charged, that differences in point of view occur and be emphasized if political decisions are to be made. Of course, he is right. What the Vice President ignored, however, was the source or the kind of divisiveness that characterized the 1970 elections. Divisiveness and polarization that spring from the exploitation of emotional feelings and fears is one thing, but polarization that results from clarification of issues and a reasoned analysis of alternatives is quite a different matter. Can there be any doubt about what approach dominated in 1970? Efron's work indicates that the same problems were, in fact, exacerbated by the commercial network newscasts in the 1968 election campaign (6).

NET and many local stations, with some financial assistance from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, did make several efforts to focus attention on the major issues. But the programs lacked a way of getting effectively into the bloodstream of local and national society. The connectors were not there. For the most part, one-way broadcasting occurred.

The much heralded youth movement into political action, that seemed so massive and potentially potent in May, 1970, at the time of the Cambodian invasion, had by October lost much of its steam. However, more than 25,000 college youth actually did engage in some kind of campaigning for the candidates of their choice in the Congressional elections of that year. Efforts to stimulate and coordinate the work of college youth in the political arena were confined largely to doorbell ringing, envelope stuffing, and other measures.

One wonders what the result would have been had the energy and idealism

of this army of young people been harnessed to a sustained effort to bring the real issues of 1970 before the American people. Suppose, for example, that groups of young people in the major metropolitan areas served by public broadcasting outlets had acted to extend or link the television broadcasts with other forms of human dialogue and with the use of educational materials. Consider, for example, how the issue of environmental pollution might have been handled. NET has shaped television programs on the threat to our environment in a manner that invites a study of causes of these threats to clear water and clean skies and an examination of the kinds of policies needed to cope effectively with them. The difficulty lies in the fact that these programs have not been effectively linked to the energies of people willing to study and take appropriate social action. No one knows what college students might have been willing to do if asked. They might have acted as recruiters for discussion groups throughout the community. They might have taken their own polls on some of the issues and recorded the results on the television screen. They could have initiated a dialogue that would have involved the American people meaningfully in a study of issues and alternative solutions rather than in angry reactions to various attempts to pin the blame for complex social problems on a particular party or a particular candidate.

John Macy, the distinguished former president of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, seemed fully committed to the notion that the Corporation play a vital role in bridging "a veritable Grand Canyon of disbelief involving both government and the media." (7) Mr. Macy believed that Public Broadcasting can close this gap and asserted that:

> We are determined to fill the desperate needs of the American people today, to become involved in the examination and definition of the problems that beset them and search for solutions.

Brave words! They come from a dedicated and experienced public servant. The difficulty is that the statement seems to rest on the assumption that it is possible to involve the American people simply by broadcasting to them. It ought to be obvious by now that this approach alone leads to failure and the wastage of resources. Public affairs broadcasting must somehow learn to take its place in a complex of interrelated forces that, when used effectively together, do succeed in involving the American people in the search for solutions to the problems they face.

By an interesting coincidence, CPB's new President, former Congressman Thomas Curtis (Rep., Mo.) did participate in the Metroplex Assembly combined TV - home group discussion operation in St. Louis, along with his Democratic opponent, in the 1962 elections (20).

1970 saw an expenditure of great sums of money, the time and energy of many dedicated people, the skills of television producers--all concerned with relating in some way to the congressional elections. Yet the result was a spasmodic and uncoordinated series of efforts that had limited impact on the outcome. (Remember again that 44 percent of college students believe that only violence will change our institutions!) There is still time to affect a grand coalition for public affairs education in which broadcasting could assume an honored and central position.

Now, let us look at some of the roadblocks that such a grand coalition must remove or surmount. The following seem at the heart of the matter:

1. Institutional rigidities, autonomy and jealousy.
2. Limited financing.
3. Differing concepts as to how education about public affairs does or should take place.
4. Lack of appropriate mechanisms at the local, state, regional, and national levels for pooling resources, exchanging information and cooperating in projects that cut across institutional lines.

Institutional Rigidities, Autonomy and Jealousy

What are the key institutions and agencies that ought to work together in public affairs education? At a minimum, the list includes the universities, colleges, and public schools; individual television stations and regional and national networks; libraries; newspapers and magazines; publishers of materials in the field of public affairs; adult and continuing educational organizations at the local, state and national level; the churches; and organizations seeking to influence the American people on a variety of public issues. Certainly, the agencies cited could form the grand coalition to help bring change about peacefully by improving the processes of educating our people. We have left out commercial broadcasting companies as potential agencies of cooperation because as Barnouw (8) and Schiller (9) have shown, their interests preclude a worthwhile role.

All of the agencies mentioned, however, have limitations of some kind that inhibit their ability to act. Tax exempt organizations,for example, are prohibited from expending significant portions of their time and resources in trying to influence legislative action. Universities, particularly those publicly supported ones, find it difficult to operate beyond the local or state jurisdiciton that supports them. Adult education organizations at national levels are generally restricted to a particular clientele; public schools, universities, and training directors operate in different circuits with limited intersection.

Other than the charge to operate in the public interest and a constant shortage of funds, what limitation keep community and educational television broadcasting stations from joining hands with other agencies in a concerted effort to involve the American people, as Mr. Macy suggested, in the search for solutions to our problems? The chief limitation on public broadcasting seems to be conceptual. That is, decisions on the allocation of funds and staff time spring from a particular concept of the role of the media rather than the nature of the educational task. Brown's chapter on public broadcasting in his recent book (10) shows the narrowness of this concept even within a view of programming as the sole function. Though Montgomery (11) indicates that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting may be beginning to see the desirability of joing hands with other agencies.

Apart from conceptual differences, much organizational rivalry exists, particularly in areas of overlapping interests. In the mid-60's, any candid examination of the activities of a number of national educational organizations concerned with poverty or ending illiteracy would show that competition and exclusion were more typical than joint programs. Institutional needs for survival, recognition and funds cannot, of course, be ignored. But must these interests always be served at the expense of mounting effective programs that draw on resources of several institutions?

Adult education organizations have been quick to establish task forces on such problems as poverty, civil rights, and pollution. They have been reluctant to divert any of their regular funda to make these task forces effective. One assumes the same statement would apply to broadcast stations. Many other instances of organizational reluctance to abandon traditional roles, to share costs of joint projects and to advance the cause of public understanding of critical issues could be cited.

The emphasis on organizational autonomy and the competition for funds and public attention are, of course, directly related to the satisfactions that the individuals who staff these organizations or provide the official leadership derive from their work or position. One of the critical problems in bringing about change and in meshing the resources of organizations, therefore, is to make certain that the personal satisfaction people receive from their involvement in organizational activities remains at a high level. Imaginative thought and creative model-making at this level are badly needed.

Individuals are going to continue to derive ego satisfaction from the direction they give to organizational activities. Likewise, organizations will continue to strive to turn in performance records that invite approval and continued support. These are facts of personal and organizational life. There is no point in reading a moral lecture to either individuals or organizations because the problem of limited cooperation is not chiefly a moral problem. Needed are sustained efforts to find ways to reward both individuals and organizations for their participation in concerted systematic attempts to be effective in the public affairs field. Certainly one essential ingredient in bringing about this change is adequate financing and the current arrangement for financing projects of any kind.

Adequate Financing

It is impossible to get any real estimate of the total funds spent yearly on public affairs education in the United States today. The problem is compounded by differences in definitions of public affairs,differences in the concept of what constitutes education as opposed to "broadcasting" or "engineering of consent," and the absence of any reliable or uniform system for determining what percentage of the budget of organizations serving several educational functions can really be said to be devoted to public affairs. Two or three examples, however, may help to point up the nature of the problem.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting has had a maximum of ten million dollars available to it in any one year during its short existence. This is a far lower sum than the 40 million dollars CPB hoped to have for its activities during its initial years and the eventual 200 million dollars it anticipates to support its work at some time in the future. Furthermore, the 9 or 10 million dollars, made up of direct appropriations from Congress and contributions from foundations and national organizations, must be divided among the several areas of interest that the Corporation serves. It is difficult to accuse CPB of failing to be fair in allocating its funds. Certainly public affairs broadcasting has loomed large in the decisions of the Corporation. The 3 million dollars that might be allotted by CPB to public affairs broadcasting in any one year has to be distributed among national production centers and regional and local centers. Considering the fact that production budgets for "quality" programs range from 10 to 100 thousand dollars an hour, the entire

budget could be consumed to produce 30 hours of broadcast time. Obviously, CPB has been more wise in its allocation of sources than to channel them all into a program costing that much.

All other problems of the community or educational broadcast stations--both radio and television-- are compounded by difficulties of financing. Many stations receive a large share of their revenue in return for the production or broadcasting of in-schools programs. Other programs are paid for by sponsors, even though the regulations governing their operations prohibit the use of advertising in connection with a sponsored broadcast. Considering the paucity of funds available to the Corporation or to local stations and regional networks, it is difficult to fault non-commercial broadcasting in terms of the allocations of resources to the production of public affairs broadcasts. The problem is not so much the allocation of resources among different programming areas as the concept of education that lies behind some programming. We shall consider that issue in the next section.

Adult and continuing education divisions of the colleges, universities, and public schools also find funds in short supply for public affairs education. Traditionally, people do not pay fees to participate in public affairs programs, unless these are subsidized by organizations that consider participation in the educational activity related to job performance. It is true that a number of organizations--the urban policy seminars of the Brookings Institutions and those of the National Institute of Public Affairs, for example-- do provide outstanding programs in public affairs education for limited numbers of people. These programs, however, are not open to the general public. Continuing education programs at institutions of higher education are generally required to be self-sustaining; funds available to churches are limited. Church budgets of many major denominations are declining in the face of decreased giving. Shrinking revenue not only affects the work of the public affairs division of a major denomination or regional grouping of churches, it tends to eliminate public affairs activities as a budget item.

Foundation grants also seem to be dwindling in this area. Foundations, because of their nature, appear disinclined to provide funds for continuing programs. They prefer to make grants to experimental programs, the continuing cost of which will be borne by someone else. One wonders what the effect might have been had a national foundation such as the Ford Foundation seen fit to invest its funds in continuing support for educational programs of considerable magnitude in the public affairs field. The Fund for Adult Education had just initiated a bold program in this direction when its work was terminated by action of the Ford Foundation Board. The success of the Mott Community School Program in Flint, Michigan, for example, is a direct testimony to the wisdom of Charles Stuart Mott in investing a considerable bulk of his fortune, not in a "pilot project" but continuing support ofr the Flint, Michigan, community school program. No foundation has ever really duplicated this kind of support. Even the Great Decisions program of the Foreign Policy Association no longer receives indirect support from the Ford Foundation.

In considering the problem of financing an adequate public affairs education program, the starting point is to recognize that public affairs education will never be self-sustaining. It can never exist on participant fees alone; some sort of subsidy will always be essential. Since foundations are reluctant to invest their funds in public affairs education, the only likely source of adequate support is the federal government. How much support,

under what restrictions, and for what specific purposes are questions that have not even yet been asked.

Those organizations and persons interested in effective public affairs education need quickly to form some kind of alliance to study the whole question of financing public affairs education as well as the methods to be used. A successful model is that followed by leaders in the broadcasting field whose work led to the establishment of CPB.

With a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, leaders in the field of educational broadcasting conducted a study that culminated in a conference to determine the long-range financial needs of educational and community television. Their report, known informally as the "Report of the Carnegie Commission" (12) was printed, widely distributed and studied. It was a major factor both in the establishment of the Corporation and setting the financial guidelines that public broadcasting would follow.

Something like that same pattern is suggested to get at the real problem of financing public affairs education. We need answers for such questions as the following:

What are the agencies that conduct any kind of public affairs education?

How do these agencies define their functions?

How do they finance them?

What role should public affairs broadcasting stations play in the development of public affairs education?

What should be the role of the universities and colleges?

What kind of mechanisms are necessary to link different agencies together?

Finally, and perhaps most important, what kind of price tag can be placed on an effective public affairs education program that links all of these different resources together?

It is going to take sustained hard thinking on the questions raised above and others to come up with any kind of an adequate platform for suggesting the ultimate cost of a national program for public affairs education in this country. Congress is not likely to listen to any kind of proposal that is not backed by data of the type suggested. The time to gather and study these data is now!

Differing Concepts of Education

It is unlikely that all of the activities labeled "public affairs education" can ever be brought within the confines of some monolithic design. Nevertheless, the assumptions regarding the nature of the educational process that lie behind different approaches to public affairs education need to be examined.

For example, there is now general agreement that education should involve activity on the part of the person being educated. Translated into television

practices, this is met at the instructional level sometimes by the development of workbooks to accompany television broadcasts, sometimes by the provision for interaction between the student and the television teacher or chief personality, and at times by both of these and other sound approaches. The problem with most public affairs broadcasts directed toward adults is that this lesson from the instructional field has not been applied.

The concept of education that most broadcasters of public affairs programs seem to have is that of one-directional flow of information, ideas, and stimuli. The hope is that somehow this will inform and enlighten people and bring about a better world. One television producer of programs, in the public affairs field, asked for his reasons in not wanting to sit down and think through the objectives of a program with people who would command such related services as reading materials and discussion guides, said, "I see my job as putting interesting personalities on the air." Period! As long as this line of thinking dominates much of public affairs broadcasting, any attempt to focus on educational objectives will be short-circuited.

Despite the fine words of CPB, Macy and other leaders, the performance of television broadcasters, including those in the public field, still lacks sensitivity to the critical issue of relating television broadcasts to other materials and services. The concept of a systems approach to the public affairs education of large numbers of people simply has not been accepted (or perhaps not understood) by most television producers and given only lip service by most operators of television stations. The several pioneering efforts in this direction described by Ohliger in 1968 (13) have been largely ignored in this country. And Ohliger's chapter in Niemi's recent book (14) notes that what efforts there have been since 1968 have been sporadic, mainly local, and poorly financed. The CPB funded a study in 1969 whose report included a statement calling for such efforts (15) and in 1972 laid plans for a 10-year thrust into the field of adult education through a unit known as ALPS (Adult Learning Program Service) (11). There are also indications that what little interest there has been anywhere in relating broadcasts to other materials and services has been with the idea of using them to manipulate mass opinion (21).

Furthermore, since the Corporation for Public Broadcasting supports television production centers, not individual producers, it has generally stopped short of suggesting experiments. CPB responds to proposals; it does not usually initiate them. CPB could, if it wished, call for proposals to produce television broadcasts to discussion groups meeting throughout the community. It might call for proposals that draw on the services of young people who want to engage in political activity to involve the community in ways yet to be devised. If the Corporation has given serious thought to these matters, its comments have so far not been publicly available.

It seems unlikely that the sustained drive to get necessary legislation to support public affairs education is likely to come from the universities, the broadcasting stations, or the national associations serving them. The current challenge is quite clear to those persons who share a common conception of how education can and should take place in the community. The need is for new patterns to integrate resources scattered through many institutions in a systems approach. The need is to generate and sustain a well organized inquiry into the problem of financing public affairs education. One hopes that educational broadcasters will be in the front lines of those persons and organizations concerned with such a study. One hopes that this study will also take a

hard look at some of the potential for citizen involvement in the rising phenomenon of cable television, as Price and Wicklein point to (16).

Needed: A National Mechanism for Public Affairs Education

Several inquiries in recent years have reached a similar conclusion (e.g., see Liveright (17), and Johnson (18).): public affairs education lacks and very badly needs one or more mechanisms that will focus and interrelate the resources of different agencies and institutions. For the better part of two years in the middle of the 60's, the Foreign Policy Association sustained a task force on public affairs education. Composed of persons from universities and colleges, the broadcast media, and national organizations concerned with educating the public, the task force never completed its work because of lack of funds. However, its work revealed the need for mechanisms to bring some kind of order into the confused field of public affairs education. The task force agreed essentially on the need for the following:

1. A clearinghouse for materials useful in public affairs education. These materials include all forms of printed media (particularly discussion guides and short background reading pieces), slides and film clips, television broadcasts, materials appropriate to various audio-visual devices.

2. Funds to support inter-institutional work on such important areas of public affairs education as conservation, foreign policy, the state of the economy and others.

3. Workshops to acquaint persons working in public affairs education programs with new materials and approaches.

4. Experimental projects at the national, regional, state, and local levels to demonstrate effective approaches to public affairs education.

A report by Blakely and Lappin (19) released in 1969 considered the problem of coordination in the field of adult education. The authors recommended that coordination be attempted in specific interest areas and urged such a development for the public affairs field.

The need is an urgent one. The challenge is to the broadcasting stations, the many different organizations and agencies that have a stake in the education of the American people on public affairs to allocate some of their resources to the process of fusing their efforts in a powerful, concerted thrust for peaceful change. If we cannot escape the limitations that cripple us, how can we expect society to change?

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